



*Office of Public Affairs
U.S. Embassy, Wellington*

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NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION APPLAUDED

United States Ambassador Bill McCormick says that the US is delighted that New Zealand has chosen to participate in the "table-top" associated with the latest Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) exercise, Exercise Leading Edge.

"The PSI is a practical response to the growing challenge posed by the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, their delivery systems, and related materials.

"The threat to all of us is that these items could fall into the hands of terrorists. The PSI is a multi-lateral effort designed to stop the illegal flow of these dangerous weapons."

The initiative was launched by President Bush in May 2003 and has grown rapidly since then. The PSI now enjoys support from 80 countries. Exercise Leading Edge is the first PSI exercise held in the Persian Gulf and begins tonight New Zealand time.

"We're delighted New Zealand is participating," said Ambassador McCormick. "The PSI allows our two countries and other partners to be coordinated and ready should action be required."

The Ambassador repeated his response to speculation associated with previous PSI exercises.

"Participation by US forces in a multilateral exercise also attended by New Zealand does not represent a change in US Government policies toward New Zealand's nuclear legislation.

"It's true that certain constraints on the relationship still exist for both sides, but we are focused on exploring areas of cooperation that will benefit both countries and the wider region.

"The US Government maintains flexible policies that allow us to meet the demands of our national security interests," he added.